

The Lightning Bug and the Firefly

NOV - - 1982

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You could put the American soldier in the middle of the Sahara Desert with just his pants and shirt and he'll come up with something pretty astounding. He could think on his feet, he didn't need some leader telling him what to do every minute.

This is why the American soldier is the best fighting man in the world and in Vietnam he proved it.

Now here's another example and this tells you why he is the best.

Units in the 1st Infantry Division, the Big Red One, with its headquarters at Lai Khe, called them Firefly Missions, while units with the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) called them Lightning Bug Missions. But, no matter what some units called them, "it was a hot time in the jungle tonight" for the enemy when they went into action.

The Firefly Missions used a searchlight equipped helicopter and worked as a team with other helicopters. After the target was located by airborne radar and clearance was

obtained from the ground commander, the helicopters and their crews went into action.

The searchlight chopper illuminated the target and the armed choppers attacked and destroyed it. Firefly Missions were very successful in Vietnam particularly against vehicles and boat movements.

Lightning Bug Missions worked pretty much like the Fireflies. They were involved in denying the enemy the use of South Vietnam's waterways. One chopper usually flew low to the ground, often at treetop level. The gunners aboard this helicopter used Sniper-scopes to spot the enemy.

Once the gunners had them in their Sniper-scopes they fired tracer ammunition to mark the target for the gunships above. Sometimes a third chopper flew above the other two choppers ejecting flares to illuminate the whole area, making night look like day.

South Vietnamese were not allowed to use the waterways at night. So anything below was considered to be enemy. These operations kept the enemy low on war supplies. They also slowed down his travel time because using the waterways made travel easier and quicker. Travel over land at night was much more difficult.

So no matter what the fighting man in Vietnam called them, Fireflies or Lightning Bugs, the enemy paid a high price to move his cargo. Yes, when the Grunt teamed up with the chopper pilot, it was "katie bar the door," for the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese and his cargo.